

GAS

A Lawyer, Trained in Crime Detection, Evolves a Perfect Plan for the Elimination of His Traditional Rival and Former Partner.

"YES," Beasley went on, with unctuous, "it was sure one narrow escape. Funny you fellows hadn't heard of it. Seems there have been heaps of cases like it, too—sort of epidemic."

Beasley was dummy, just then, in the daily bridge game on the four-fifty-five. He was not one of the regular players. In fact, he was a bore, whom his fellow-commuters generally shunned with much industry and skill. But even the presence of a bore, at the card table between the seats of the smoker, is better than to play three-handed. So when Gribble missed his train that afternoon, and no other available bridge timber was at hand, Roke and Denham and Tennis had asked Beasley to sit in.

None of the others encouraged him to go on with his recital. But Beasley seldom needed urging. A momentary gap of silence was all he asked.

"Yep," he droned on, "happened last Thursday night. That's why I haven't been aboard since then till today."

The three players, excited, tense, slapped down their cards with the customary commuter gesture. But Beasley was not troubled by any lack of attention.

"I went out into the garage," he pressed on. "Had nothing to do that evening. Thought it was a good chance to go over the little car. Cold night, you remember—Thursday. So I switched on the electric light and shut the garage doors. Then I started the engine, to see if I could locate that knock I was telling you about. Well—"

"If you'd held back that ace—"

began Denham, frowning at his partner as the hand ended. "If you'd held it back that time, and played the—"

"Huh?" grunted Beasley. "Oh, I thought you were talking to me. Let's see, where had I got to? Oh, yes. Well, there I was, shut up there, with the engine purring as sweet as you please, and the lights all on and me tinkering away at the old boat. And I thought to myself: 'Now, this is real cozy.' And the next thing I knew I was on the floor, with a Doc Merriam working over me with a pulmotor, and the wife blubbering and—"

"Two clubs," interposed Tennis, ruffling his cards.

"Four diamonds," said Denham, with razziness bred of low stakes.

"You see," gabbled Beasley, hurriedly, through his yarn in the moment which even commuter card etiquette allowed for Roke to decide on a bid, "you see, it was the carbon monoxide from the exhaust that got me. Doc Merriam told me all about it. Said if Danny hadn't happened to come out to the garage to get the car, and I'd been coiled, I'd have been a deader. Dozens of folks have been killed that way, Doc says."

TO Beasley's relief Roke had suddenly begun to pay the most flattering attention to the long-drawn-out tale. To the disgust of his fidgeting fellow-players, he laid aside his hand, and asked:

"What's the main point? How could the gas from a car kill anybody? I've puttered around the exhaust of my car a hundred times or more, and it never did anything worse than make me cough."

"Ah!" exclaimed Beasley with an air of utter wisdom. "That's because you were in the open. The gas was dissipated by the outer air. I asked Doc that same thing; and he told me so. It—"

"Does—" began Roke.

"For heaven's sake!" stormed Tennis. "Are we playing cards or are we—"

"Station after next is mine," grumbled Denham in the same breath. "Cut out the—"

"Here's the idea," boomed the insistent Beasley, thrilled at the rarity of having one civil commiseration near as I could understand Doc's long-drawn-out tale. When there's imperfect combustion—and there always is, of course—it generates carbon monoxide gas. It fills the room and it fills any one who has the bad luck to be in the room. First of all, it hits the lungs and puts them out of commission. That's why I've been in bed for three days. Then it stops the heart. And by that time, the victim is ready for a whiteilly. Doc says dozens of—"

"Play cards!" fumed Denham.

Roke, with a mutter of apology, picked up his hand and proceeded to turn a deaf ear to Beasley's further tirade. Roke was a good player—which was lucky! For during the rest of the game he played wholly by the aid of his subconscious mind. His conscious mentality was miles away from the stuffy smoker and was racing as never had a suburban train the power to race.

And that night, after dinner, Roke went across to the Paington Public Library, where for an hour, he read. And the books piled up in front of him on the shiny table were all concerned with chemistry and the popular sciences generally. From time to time he made a note on a scratch-pad. Then he returned home—and lay awake until dawn.

MAXWELL CLIVE and Roke had started life as law partners. Clive, within a few years, had broken loose from the partnership and had forged ahead—acquiring a brilliant success. In a small way, while Roke had remained a mediocrity. Next, Clive had won and married the fluff-brained girl to whose volatile heart Roke had been laying siege for the best part of two years. Always it had been like that. Always the pair had been thrown together by destiny. And always Clive had won.

In Roke's soul, during the slow passing of the years, a natural dislike for his rival had deepened, bit by bit, into a hatred which in time waxed coldly murderous. Calmly, unswervingly, he yearned for the other's destruction. The yearning grew to be the strongest thing in his warped and disappointed nature.

Clive and Roke met—when meet they must—on courteous, even cordial terms, as befitted two former partners who had once wooed the same girl. Clive had no special aversion for Roke; nor, naturally, did he dream of the latter's all-encompassing hatred for him.

By Albert Payson Terhune

how, that he could not fall in his enterprise.

Into his thoughts flashed the old line:

"A poor man, served by you, shall make you rich!"

And as if to prove a new phase of the gambling superstition, Maxwell Clive's car drew up in front of the closed ferry gate less than sixty seconds later.

"A poor man, served by you, shall make you rich!" whispered Roke exultingly.

No boat was in, nor would be for a few minutes. Nor was there any other car, on this wintry night, waiting for it. Roke, in view of this, ventured on a variation of his original plan. He slipped out of the dark angle, made a slight detour and approached the waiting car as though from the street.

"Why, hello Clive!" he hailed, peering uncertainly in at the half-visible figure in the driving seat. "That you? Filthy night, isn't it?"

"Rotten," agreed Clive, leaning forward with no great enthusiasm to accept the gloved hand proffered him over the top of the car door. "Been in town to the theater?"

"Yes. But I left early. I've got some of the treasury accounts to go over before I get to bed. By the way, there are a bunch of things—some of them petty and some of them not—about that job that I'd like to talk over with you sometime soon."

"Sure," assented Clive. "Any time. Drop in tomorrow evening, if you like."

"Thanks. But I've got to come to the city tomorrow night. I—I wonder if you'd mind very much if I ride out with you tonight, instead of taking the train? If you'd rather not, say so. But I could tell you about the way home, and—"

"Why, certainly," said Clive, still with no vast enthusiasm. "Climb on in. Would you rather take the back seat? The curtains are up, there, and you won't get so wet."

"No, thanks," answered Roke, climbing aboard. "I'll sit in with you, if I can't get a taxi."

Roke was ready for this. For a week he had been rehearsing his line of conversation. And he launched forth into a long discourse on fiscal conditions in Paington, decanting on the list of borough notes and their dates and renewals, and on the possible uncertainty of one or two hitherto sure sources of revenue.

He talked glibly and with much amplification. He had every feature of his job at his tongue's end, and had marshaled quite an array of problems connected with it, problems whose discussion struck the listener as wholly reasonable.

The harangue lasted until the few misty lights of Paington came into view. The car neared Clive's house. The driver made as though to keep on toward Roke's mile-distant home. But Roke would not have it so.

"No, no!" he begged. "I always take a long walk, before I turn in. I can't sleep if I don't. And the walk home is what I need. But if you don't mind I'll stop here for a very few minutes longer. I won't keep you up. There's a rather big point in connection with the job that I want to touch on, before we finish this talk. I can do it in three minutes. Drive on to your garage. I can tell you about it while you're putting up the car. Then I'll say good-night and chase home."

"Here's the idea," he continued: "I've reason to believe—mind you, this is in strict confidence, old man—I have reason to think a man connected with the borough administration is a thief. I mean it. I have been watching him for a long time. And I believe he is juggling some of the borough funds. I'll tell you his name, too. It's only right you should know, so you can be on your guard when you step into my job. He—"

Roke paused. The car was rolling into the small garage. It came to a stop. Clive mechanically bent over to switch off the lamps. Roke, from the street, had repeatedly seen him

do this, the moment the machine was halted.

AS Clive leaned forward, Roke struck. The blackjack blow was delivered with scientific force and unerring aim. With it went all Roke's muscular strength.

Clive slumped forward in a ludicrous, spineless heap, over the steering wheel, and then slid limply down across the pedals.

On the instant, Roke had descended from the car. Pausing only to start again the just-stopped engine, he went to work with swiftly businesslike precision. Closing the garage doors—first making sure there was no light or sign of waking life in the house beyond—he lifted the sprawling man to the concrete floor and stripped from him his ulster and coat and waistcoat. These garments he folded with meticulous care and laid across a tire rack. Then, from under the front seat, he exhumed a tool kit.

Spread it open on the floor, selected therefrom a pair of pliers and thrust them into Clive's limp hand. Opening the hood of the car, he stood for a moment looking down on his victim.

His single blow had sufficed to knock all consciousness from the man's head. Clive was due to remain unconscious for many minutes to come as a result of the black-jack smash. And in that little, tight, one-car garage, ten minutes would be long enough for the gas to do its work. There was no need to do it.

The single blow, if investigation were made, would be attributed to the fall on the hard floor.

Roke's work was done. And it was done well. He tiptoed out of the garage leaving the engine still running and the lamps on, and closed the door tightly behind him.

Homeward he made his way. Apart from a tingle of exultation, he had no unusual feelings after his well-rehearsed deed. The work was done—done safely from the dire peril which had menaced him. He had gotten rid of the man who had been his hoodoo, his Nemesis, since boyhood.

In time, perhaps, Mrs. Clive might so far recover from her grief as to smile again on the suitor who had wooed and so nearly won her before his rival had swept her off her feet. But on this golden phase of the future Roke would not let himself dwell. It seemed scarce decorous, just yet.

Half-indulgently he found himself wondering as to the gambler psychology which had made his plans move on, grasped wheels from the very moment he gave \$5 to the cringing beggar. There must assuredly be something in such a superstition. He admitted that, even to his coldly skeptical self. Else, how account for the perfect assurance of victory which had been his from that moment on? How else account for the success of every step of his scheme since then?

Roke slept like a child. Drowsily awakened, at sunrise, he lay still for a little while, trying to realize why he felt so unaccountably happy. Then he gradually remembered; and he stretched himself out in bed with a sensation of utter bliss. How different was this from the awakenings when the danger of his position had dawned at his throat like a mad cat, the very moment his mind was clear enough to function!

"A poor man, served by you, shall make you rich!" he exulted.

He was turning over for another happy snooze, when his one servant—an old woman—tapped at his door.

"Mr. Roke," she quavered, "there's two men—two gentlemen—downstairs to see you. I told 'em you wasn't up yet. But they said it was very important. They—"

"Oh, all right!" Roke cut her short. "Say I'll be right down."

He was climbing out of bed, as he spoke. Gone was the delicious drowsiness of a minute before. He was alert, wide-awake, ready.

Clive's death, no doubt, had been discovered. Some neighbor, knowing Roke's close acquaintanceship with the dead man, had called to tell him of the tragic accident. That, or else some Paington commuter had caught a glimpse of the two as they rode into the borough together, the night before, and Roke's perfunctory testi-

mony was wanted by the coroner, as "the last person who had seen the deceased alive."

In either event Roke was ready—ready and eager. There was not the remotest flaw in his case.

SWIFTLY he tossed on his clothes, waiting not to bathe or to shave or so much as to wash his face. A haggard aspect would well become him on hearing of his old associate's death.

In less than five minutes he was clad, and was thrusting his feet into a pair of slippers. He looked up from this brief task at sound of steps on the stairs and in the passage outside his bedroom. There were two sets of steps. Evidently his visitors were unwilling to wait for his descent to the living-room and had come upstairs in search of him.

Roke's brow creased at this undue liberty of theirs as he rose and started across the room to meet them.

As he was midway in his advance there sounded a peremptory knock at the door panel. Without waiting for a response, the man who had knocked turned the knob and flung wide the door.

Roke halted with ludicrous haste in his careless stroll across the room. His jaw hung loose. His eyes bulged like a sick frog's.

On the threshold—a neat little bandage encircling his head—stood Maxwell Clive.

He looked pallid and as though he had not slept. The bandage was held in place by a wad of gauze dressing above a bump on his head. Just behind him in the doorway loomed the portly figure of the borough chief of police. In one of the chief's hamlike hands was clutched an official-looking paper. From

the other dangled a pair of handcuffs.

"Very prettily done, Roke," commented Clive, breaking the moment of stark silence with a slow drawl which was threaded by saturnine grimaces. "Very prettily! And if I hadn't forgotten to stop at the service station on the way from town last night it would have worked. But, you see, it happened there was only about a pint of gas left in the tank. The engine stopped automatically before it could pump enough carbon monoxide into the garage you so thoughtfully closed. Probably the gasoline stopped before you were half way home."

Roke did not speak. Through his dizzy brain raced the thought: "A pint of gas? A pint of gas? A flawless plan wrecked—a sentence in jail—the end of all the world for me! Three cents' worth of gasoline to smash a man's life! Three cents!"

"I was suffering a good bit from that tap over the head when I came to," went on Clive to unhearing ears. "But I had sense enough to see the gas switch was turned on. And I had sworn I had turned it off. I saw the garage door was shut. And it had been open. It got me to thinking maybe you should have tried such a thing. And I went over to the borough hall, and through the books there. It took me most of the night. But I got what I went for. I got enough for the warrant Chief McCabe is waiting so courteously to read to you."

He paused. The chief stepped forward. Roke lifted his heavy head and his cracked lips parted in the words: "Three cents."

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AS CLIVE LEANED FORWARD, Roke struck.

Togo Interviews a Diplomat.

(Continued from Fifth Page.)

Public Information have loaned to the Postoffice Dept. From the Pavilion of Divine Understanding, several drain-pipes has fallen down to knock out the Tablets of Ten Thousand Wonders. The Great Bronze Bowls of the External Court is getting roostered on by too many birds. And so onwards everywhere.

Yet I am sort of thanksgiving for that spirit of liberty which have accomplished all this because it give me such a sweet chance of seeing so much without a royal invitation. In companionship with ricksha-men, dogs, photographers, American millionaires and other persons, I can enter right up to Temple of Heaven and light cigarettes on High Altar where emperors formerly came on April 1 to shake hands alone with the Ruler of the Universe. Think of Hashimura Togo in such position while being photographed! Do this not make you proud to think that the Chinese Empire have fell and spread apart?

That city of Peking have got so much beauty in it that my intellectual brain have got sort of cross-eyed looking at too much too quickly.

American gentleman which I met here say that Peking are cheapest place to go to Hal in he have yet struck.

In central heart of Peking are to be found the Foreign or Legation Quarter. There reside all the Ambassadors of European Powers with England in the best place, as usual, and America in the worst. This arrangement were fixed by the following history:

When Emperor got kick-out & Republic got kick-in all those European Powers jump rapidly for find some legations. England she select the home of an Emperor. Japan she select the home of an Empress. France she select the Household of the Royal Concubines. America, who were awaiting for Congress to telegraph orders, a little late. Therefore she took what were left.

How lovely America she hold up her dignity pretty good, by golly, and can keep persons awaiting for passports just as long as anybody, except Japan.

When I arrive to Peking the President of that Republic and I were there in gas, for he do me the great official honor of saying he were sick and could not see me. Maybe he got

too many worries for to be probed by a bright mind like me. This gentleman, who are called Tsai Kun in his own language must love China a great lot, for he pay 10000000 for get himself elected. And when Congress see that money they make it unanimous. Since that date he have lived quiet life peculiar to Chinese Presidents wishing to remain so.

WHILE writing this letter, Mr. Editor, I am straining myself to do so.

Before buying my ticket from Peking I wish tell you one (1) more great man of China which I saw, but not so near.

This Chinese Philosopher say I could not find unless I go see Hon. Mai Lan Fang, celebrated Chinese actress.

Hon. Mai Lan make 5000000000 by acting like a lady. I know several Americans who gets much less for this hard job. But I are willing to do anything 2cc (quotation from Harry Thacker) so I follow the noise of burstin' tin & get into theater where I found that what I heard was music.

There on stage was 2 oldy gentlemen with blue whisker & gaudy robes sticking out of their hair while they kick both ways with Chinese boots & holla "Woo-gow! Howlow! Cheeeeee!"

BANG!!! (Noise by orchestra).

Some Siberian maidens carrying red white & blue freshovers march 4th amid more kinds of noises.

Then I hear a cat. It were not a very good cat. I know of 9 in my backyard what can sing several tunes better. Yet it were a cat undoubtedly.

Then what I see?

By golly, it were not a cat nor even a kitten. It were that celebrated Mr. Mai Lan Fang, disguised to look like a Pekinese who-girl with Mary Garden power on his or her face & a mince-ple walk.

"If you love China," say Hon. Philosopher hurtly, "you should learn to love our music. Are you music a universal language?"

"Then what I see, Mr. Philosopher," I narrate peevily. "America & China can become close-harmony on your delicious cookery. America & China can associate in methods of democracy & politick corruption. In art both countries can cabot a great deal. However, America she hold up her dignity pretty good, by golly, and can keep persons awaiting for passports just as long as anybody, except Japan."

"He wish know," say Hon. Philosopher, "if you have any more questions to ask?"

After that this odiousness was over. When we got outside by bowing backwards 66 times I require peevily from

Yours truly
HASHIMURA TOGO.
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DETACHING THE FIVE FROM THE REST OF THE BILLS, Roke handed it to the grateful beggar.